

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6315

Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez, Ranking Democratic Member
Small Business Committee
Testimony Before The House Administration Committee
Statement on the Committee Budget
March 7, 2001

Chairman Ney, Ranking Member Hoyer and members of the Committee, I come before you today, having completed my first full term as the Ranking Democratic Member of the Committee on Small Business. One of my primary goals, is not just to assess the amount budgeted to the Committee, but to provide a comprehensive evaluation of its ability to carry out its duties. If we are to accomplish our goals, we need to have the proper resources necessary to undertake our legislative agenda.

The Small Business Committee must continue to serve as the "watchdog" for small businesses, which are the primary force in our economy. Our new Chairman, Mr. Manzullo, has put forth an aggressive Oversight Plan that builds on the Committee's success in the last Congress, during which we passed 27 Bills and saw 20 signed into law. Unfortunately I have to report to the Committee that not only have I not seen the Committee's budget but also the Minority was not given the opportunity for meaningful input into the process. Mr. Manzullo and I did have an initial meeting to discuss the Committee's agenda, legislative plan and administrative issues. At that time, I indicated some of the needs that the Minority had. Mr. Manzullo expressed a willingness to address them, but little has been done since then. At no time was the Minority consulted to fully explain our funding needs. Repeated attempts to gain even minimal information have been rebuffed.

We have, however, received limited information on some Committee funding and the portion that is planned for the Minority. However, because we have not received the comprehensive budget, we have no way of knowing if these numbers are accurate. Based on what I have learned, the Chairman is requesting a six and nine percent increase. While this is similar to the request made by Chairman Talent, it is clearly insufficient to meet the current staffing needs of the Committee. During my last appearance before the Committee, I expressed some reservations over our funding levels. Now as the Ranking Member, I have a much greater perspective on the overall needs of the Minority. In retrospect, the funding request by Chairman Talent was insufficient, and the final amount provided under the funding resolution left us severely under-funded, greatly impacting our ability to hire and retain qualified staff.

Mr. Chairman, House salary levels are quickly falling behind that of the Senate and the private sector, causing a "staff drain" of qualified individuals. Speaker Hastert recognized this when he authorized a 10 percent increase to each Member's Representational Allowance. He knew we needed to make House salaries more competitive. That's why our Committee's request for less makes no sense. A more realistic level of funding for salaries would have been a 20 to 30 percent increase. Let me point out that the Small Business Committee has the fewest staff slots of any other Committee. The Committee currently has 31 allocated slots, 10 of which go to the Minority, or slightly less than the traditional one-third. When I was first selected as the Ranking Democratic Member, I expressed reservations over the ability of the Minority to provide support to the Members of the Committee at this funding level. I was assured by the Chairman that most of the administrative functions would be handled through the Majority. That simply has not been the case. Instead our Committee relies on one full time staffer and the support of one shared employee to provide administrative services to the Minority Members.

To correct this inequality, I am requesting an overall increase in the Committee slots to 36, with the minority afforded the traditional one-third, or 12. In terms of the Committee's other expenses, it has been customary for the Minority to receive "reasonable accommodation" and that has not taken place. Items like periodicals, software, computers, copiers, fax machines and staff travel requests have all been denied. Our photo copiers and fax machines are antiquated, having been in the Minority office since the 103rd Congress. It is my understanding that Mr. Manzullo's budget request includes a request for a copier and two fax machines for the Minority. But had the Minority been fully consulted, we would have pointed out that there was a greater need than for just those items. By the end of this Congress the computers used by the Minority will be over 4 years old. With the ever-changing technology, this makes us unable to adequately serve our Members. This item should have been factored into the Committee budget.

It is my hope that this Committee will see fit to provide us with a funding level that is more realistic and represents our true needs. I reiterate the request I made last Congress, that the Minority be given control over one-third of the entire budget allotted to the Committee just as the Committee on House Administration and the Committee on Way and Means receive.

I am confident that the Small Business Committee is committed to working together to strengthen our nation's small businesses. And if there is anything to be learned from the previous Congress it is that working together in a bipartisan fashion provides significant results. I look forward to working with Chairman Manzullo to continue this success, and I hope this Committee will take into strong consideration my recommendations.